



Introduction for CCIJ History of Public Relations special issue

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This special issue celebrates the tenth anniversary of the International History of Public Relations Conference at Bournemouth University. Founded by Professor Tom Watson in 2010, the conference has played a significant role in developing public relations history as a specialist field. It has led to an edited series of books, *Other Voices: National Perspectives on Public Relations History* (Watson, 2014-2017), designed to globalize the writing of the history of public relations, a number of journal special issues and created many opportunities for the growth of history scholarship in the field.

Much of the early public relations history writing was largely descriptive in documenting histories of professional associations, national histories, or pivotal (mostly male) figures and pioneers. That same research was subject to a limited scope of theories and applications. Since that first conference in 2010, Watson (2013) identified the need for more critical approaches that avoided writing the historical development of the field in terms of an evolution towards the modern profession. There is the opportunity for a more sophisticated understanding of historiography, more critical and sociocultural perspectives and more evidence-based histories that can challenge what we think we know about public relations history. Exploring these angles allows a deep understanding of public relations, historical propaganda and communication and the significant, yet understudied, historical role of public relations in society and the social and cultural conditions which gave rise to public relations activity (Fitch & L'Etang, 2017).

The papers in this issue resonate with the top themes of the International History of Public Relations Conference over its first decade: questions of professionalism, the role of education; national identities and branding; political communication, and social change. Following a decade of scholarship dedicated to understanding the underpinnings of historiography in public relations, we have begun to move toward a more nuanced understanding of the role public relations has played in shaping society at all levels.

The ten papers in this special issue offer a glimpse into this evolution of the history of public relations. The articles offer a range of methodological approaches and explore diverse themes. Many of the papers are analytical and/or critical and foreground an awareness of historiographical challenges in researching and writing public relations history. Methodological approaches include archival research, interviews, biography, autoethnography and case studies. The collection also offers some geographical spread that continues to represent the global impact of public relations and its role in modern societies, with contributions from Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates as well as the UK, Germany and the USA.

Gareth Thompson's investigation of British Union of Fascists considers specific cultural and political conditions that gave rise to publicity, public relations and propaganda and notes considerable slippage between these terms. Drawing on archival research, Thompson considers how public relations helped construct Oswald Mosely as a celebrity in a uniquely British manifestation of fascism. He offers a compelling narrative that has contemporary significance for political rallies as performative spectacle that offer opportunities for publicity and celebrity.

In *Authorial Voices*, Conor McGrath offers a rich and nuanced biography of former priest, practitioner and educator, Francis X. Carty. McGrath draws on Carty's diverse writing to integrate his biography and memoirs with his public relations and other work. The result is an engaging and original paper that considers public relations and a significant biography for the field in the context of broader political, social and cultural contexts in twentieth century Ireland. This paper contributes

to a better understanding of the historical development of public relations in Ireland, about which little has been written, and offers a nuanced biography of someone who played a role in that development, particularly through education, but who also had a rich and diverse life, evident in their writing, outside of that role.

Arne Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz explore the entanglement of journalism, public diplomacy and public relations in their investigation of communication history of the League of Nations. The League was established after World War I with the aim of ensuring world peace. In the relatively small city of Geneva, which became the League's headquarters from late 1920, the authors argue the League's Information Section and international journalists effectively became an epistemic project to promote open, global communication. Interestingly Edward Bernays and Walter Lippmann were members of the American team at the 1919 Paris conference; Australian media mogul Keith Murdoch was also present.

Drawing on extensive research in the National Archives of Thailand, Napawan Tantivejakul details Siam's public relations and public diplomacy efforts under the leadership of King Rama V in the late nineteenth century. This work, which included government press relations, media monitoring and international tours, ensured Siam had a high profile internationally and protected Siam from the threat of colonialism. It is worth noting that Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia never to have been colonised by the West. This paper offers original insights into the historical use of public relations to support an anti-colonisation strategy by promoting Siam as a civilised and modern country.

Anne Gregory explores ongoing issues around the legitimacy of public relations, by documenting the process that led to the Royal Charter granted to the Institute of Public Relations in 2005, and reflecting on the UK public relations industry 15 years later through the 2019 *State of the Profession* report. Gregory, in her capacity as then-president of the Institute, played a key role on securing Chartered Status. She points to a number of contemporary challenges in the UK, including a profound lack of diversity in what is a mostly white, female and middle class membership base and ongoing jurisdictional issues with competing fields. In response to the Bell Pottinger case, Gregory also identified the need for more leadership on ethical and public interest issues.

In *Bandwith Lost*, Jessica Borge uses a micro-history approach and archival research to document the public relations activity of the British Family Planning Association (FPA) in the 1950s and FPA's efforts to promote family planning via the new medium of television. By all accounts, the telegenic FPA chair, Margaret Pyke, was a successful and charismatic advocate for family planning and the FPA achieved explicit television coverage in 1955 as a result of a focused public relations campaign. The topic, birth control and family planning, suggests an original approach to researching public relations and social change.

Using Curtin and Gaither's cultural-economic model, William Anderson offers a historical case study of measurement in public relations. This sophisticated application of the model considers how social hygienists in the 1920s constructed particular discourses and identities in brochures and film and how they evaluated the success of this communication activity. The social hygienists presented the preferred way of thinking and behaving in order to be a 'good American' and commissioned research to measure audience reaction, reinforcing the notion of meaning making as a dynamic and contested process.

Acknowledging the limited research into public relations in the Middle East, Khaled Zamoum and T. Serra Gorpe document the changing political, social and cultural landscape in Dubai since the

formation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971 and the conditions that gave rise to the development of public relations. International universities have taught public relations in Dubai for at least two decades, although public relations teaching at public universities dates back to the 1980s. Drawing on interviews with educators, Zamoum and Gorpe found globalised understandings of public relations and western practices prevailed over local components, with some resistance to the liberal arts orientation of US degree structures and international accreditation expectations.

Teaching history is challenging in a crowded curriculum that continues to prioritise industry concerns and practices; it is not helped by the uncritical and often poorly sourced versions of public relations history included in textbooks. However, Fitch and L'Etang argue in their paper for a stronger role for history in the curriculum, arguing the teaching of both public relations theory and practice could be substantially enhanced with better understanding and analysis of historical contexts, concepts and relationships. Teaching history also allows students to better understand their responsibilities as future communicators and the ways public relations engages with and impacts on society.

Kinnear challenges the Aotearoan/New Zealand concept of unity encompassed in the branding of a New Zealand identity. The Maori phrase, 'He iwi tahi tatou', stated at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, means 'We are one people' and is echoed by PM Jacinda Ardern in her response to the Christchurch attacks. Kinnear explores a range of state sponsored promotional work, which includes public relations, to conclude that 'We are one' offers only a limited and exclusionary identity for New Zealand, and one which excludes along gender, race and ethnic lines. This finding is a significant given the rise in white supremacy, which contributed to the Christchurch mosque attacks, albeit by an Australian citizen. Kinnear's paper expands public relations history scholarship in that it situates public relations activity within a broader understanding of state-sponsored promotions of nation branding and national identity.

This special issue aims to review history scholarship in the discipline after a decade of International History of Public Relations conferences at Bournemouth University and to point to the way forward. Evident in many of the papers presented in this issue are more developed theoretical perspectives that engage with historical scholarship and thinking, foreground historiographical challenges and move beyond professional narratives and disciplinary silos. These papers heed Watson's call for public relations history to 'be more dangerous' and to 'avoid Grunigian analysis as a historiographic tool' (2013, p. 9) and, in doing so, expand boundaries of thinking of what is and is not public relations history.

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